

VZCZCXRO8940
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #4622/01 3531455
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 191455Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8591
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC//NSC//

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004622

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/15/2016
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: DISABLED IN IRAQ: HANDICAPPED SOCIETY DESCRIBES
POLITICAL MARGINALIZATION, POOR SERVICES

Classified By: POLCOUNS MARGARET SCOBIEY FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. Members of the Iraqi Handicapped Society (IHS) told Emboffs December 13 that physically and mentally handicapped persons continued to be marginalized in Iraq, receiving little political attention or services from the government. "In the old regime, Saddam paid little attention to the disabled, except for veterans of the Iraq-Iran war. Now even they are ignored". IHS head Mowaffoq al-Khafaji added that the level of violence had detracted attention from social issues like those championed by his NGO, while contributing to an increased disabled population, estimated to be between 1-2 million. He agreed that the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) provided services to handicapped persons, such as job training and employment, but said that the services were sub-par and benefited a very small portion of the population. He added that southern Iraq in particular had little to no social support or awareness for the handicapped population. IHS, comprised of 60,000 members and supported by international funding, is a non-profit organization that facilitates awareness campaigns and lobbies on behalf of handicapped persons. End Summary.

WE'RE IN A DEMOCRACY, YET WE HAVE NO POLITICAL VOICE

12. (C) In a conversation December 13, IHS members Mowaffoq al-Khafaji and Ahmed LNU told EmbOffs that they were disappointed that the new democracy had not yet produced the hoped for results for the disabled population. They complained that both the former regime and present day Iraq ignored the plight of the disabled population--though he pointed out that at least during Saddam Hussein's regime, disabled veterans were provided with plots of lands and stipends. "We have no political voice; we do not have a

committee in parliament, nor anyone who represents us even though our numbers are so large". Al-Khafaji acknowledged that there were no reliable statistics on hand for the disabled population, but estimated that between 1 and 2 million Iraqis were physically or mentally disabled, a number that was growing each day with the continued violence.

13. (C) IHS member Ahmed described their efforts to lobby political party leaders and local and national level politicians, noting that they received the most support from female politicians as well as KRG officials. From Baghdad leaders, he reported, he received lukewarm attention, and in some cases some outright antagonism on the part of local city council leaders who were clear in saying that disabled veterans from the Iran-Iraq war should not be allowed any services. Al-Khafaji noted that the social and political support system for the population was extremely undeveloped in southern Iraq while in Kurdistan awareness and services was much more extensive -- which he attributed to a longer period of NGO existence in the KRG region.

SERVICES EITHER POOR OR NON-EXISTANT

BAGHDAD 00004622 002 OF 002

14. (C) Al-Khafaji explained that the handicapped population was beset by poor social and health services overall. Little specialty care was available, let alone good health services overall. Prosthetics and other specialized medical items were very seldom available. Though acknowledging that MOLSA did provide services and in some cases employment to the disabled, he argued that MOLSA provided services on such a small scale as to make their services negligible over all. Al-Khafaji indicated that several specialty schools existed in Baghdad as well as homes for extremely disabled persons, but that the schools were private and meant for those with sufficient means.

15. (C) In a previous conversation in early December, MOLSA services director Layla Kadhim told Poloff that her directorate provided employment skills workshops to hundreds of handicapped persons, and funded several homes (currently holding a total of 50 people) for the severely disabled. She bemoaned the lack of staff expertise in dealing with the disabled population and requested that training be given to her staff who only knew how to give basic care.

COMMENT

16. (C) Many of the issues that this NGO described (e.g.,

limited services and poor health care) are issues faced by the whole population but which impact the disabled population to an even greater degree. The Council of Representatives Committee on Martyrs, Victims, and Political Prisoners is charged with following up on the affairs of people with special needs. However, members of the committee have generally described their focus as "violence victims-oriented". Both MoLSA and even the Ministry of Human Rights provide some compensation to special needs population, but both ministries acknowledge that they can only provide a small amount. As such, the needs and concerns of Iraq's disabled go largely unmet. One Iraqi NGO worker recently commented to Poloff that most Iraqis' biggest fear is not death as a result of a terrorist or militia attack, but rather becoming severely disabled and, in their view, a burden to family members who would receive little if any assistance from the state.

KHALILZAD